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Some senators calling of CIA's Casey 'whitewash'

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WASHINGTON — The Senate Intelligence Committee probe of the financial history of CIA Director William J. Casey is being described by some members of that committee as "a whitewash."

Senators of both parties attending the closed meetings say no startling revelations about the 68-year-old spy chief's business dealings have turned up.

However, two key committee members say preliminary findings presented to the senators in closed session Thursday convinced them that important leads were not followed and probers have not pressed Casey to provide explanations for omissions in his testimony about his business dealings.

But both senators conceded that no new evidence has come before the committee that would justify asking Casey to step down.

Other senators at the meeting say there was a feeling that the case had to be closed.

The senators asked not to be identified because Senate rules prohibit their revealing what went on at a closed session.

One Eastern Republican said of the probe: "You are never going to totally unravel this mess . . . but we have other pressing business."

Though Chairman Barry M. Goldwater, R-Ariz., has said that "only loose ends" remain in the probe, which might take another month to complete, others on the committee expressed dissatisfaction with the direction of Majority Counsel Fred R. Thompson.

Committee spokesman Spencer Davis defended the probe, saying, "I wouldn't call this a whitewash. I don't think we would want to have reporters turn up new material we had not found. I think they are trying to be careful."

But several senators on the committee paint a far different picture. They say the aging Goldwater, suffering constant leg pains, wants the Casey probe stopped because he fears that the country would be the loser in any fight over Casey's business ethics.

Goldwater has told these members of the committee that if the Casey probe heats up again: "We will lose the one intelligence professional we trust in this crowd."

He is referring to Deputy CIA Director Bobby Ray Inman, who has strong support across the political spectrum.

Goldwater has, he told some of his colleagues, "absolute faith" that if the intelligence committee goes after Casey, Inman, now the No. 2 spymaster, will not replace Casey, but would himself be replaced.

These senators say they were told in no uncertain terms last August that unless the committee laid off Casey that Inman would be replaced.

According to these senators, Goldwater is privately telling them that Inman is an intelligence professional that the country cannot afford to lose in a bloody political fight.

According to other committee sources Inman has also been the only intelligence official cool to two CIA proposals. The first, a secret plan involving the Middle East, was proposed in the spring. Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr., D-Del., who would not provide any details of the plan said only: "It was so outrageous that we

told Casey and Max Hugel to rethink it. They did and it was dropped."

Another senator said that Inman had effectively convinced Casey and Hugel that the plan, involving a violent covert action mission, was madness and should not be attempted.

Inman is also credited with urging Casey and the Reagan White House to go easy on proposals to end restrictions on CIA clandestine operations both in and out of the country.

Hugel resigned in July as head of the clandestine services of the CIA after the Washington Post printed a damaging interview with two of his former business associates. Casey became the target of critical comment after the Hugel flap and when the News-Journal newspapers revealed that his business partner in a failed venture had become associated with organized crime figures and had been made a federal witness.

Both Biden and Sen. William V. Roth, R-Del., called for Casey's resignation after news accounts of his business dealings appeared.